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WORLD VIEW OF THE TAPIRAPE INDIANS

By Charles Wagley

The Tapirape live in Central Brazil north of the Tapirape River, a western affluent of the Araguaya River. They are a Tupi-speaking people isolated from other peoples speaking the same language. Culturally they are related more closely to the Tupi-speaking people of the east than to those of the head waters of the Xingu River. The only peoples with whom they have had contacts within historic times are their northern neighbors, the Gês-speaking Northern Kayapo and the Carajá (including the Javahe branch) of the Araguaya. Because of hostility with both these neighboring peoples, the Tapirape have withdrawn farther from the Anguaya and have contacts at present with the Carajá only through occasional European visitors. Introduced disease, acquired from these visitors and earlier from the Carajá, have reduced the Tapirape from five large villages (originally more than two hundred per village) to one with less than 150 people. Contacts with Europeans, however, have been short and few, leaving the Tapirape aboriginal culture little changed.

According to Tapirape tradition, they came to their present home from the north and east.[1] One group of them lived on the Araguaya and for a time shared a common village with the Javahe branch of the Carajá. The Tapirape are traditionally interested in country to the east, not to the west. It is to the east that Maratawa, the "home of the gods," lies, and in this direction, too, is the home of two legendary peoples: the Wanchira, a cannibalistic tribe which ate a famous mythical ancestor of the Tapirape, and the "other Tapirape," speaking the same language and sharing the same culture. East of the Araguaya River there is said to be another large river and great mountains where various supernaturals live.

Formerly, Tapirape who were captives of the Carajá returned to tell of that country and people, and in modern times Tapirape have visited both Carajá and Kayapo, as well as various Brazilian settlements on the Araguaya. No foreign or hostile tribes prevent them from wandering westward into the open country toward the Xingu River, but it is a region of little interest to them, and they never travel far in this direction. Of the Xingu River and people, they know only what Brazilian visitors have told

[1] According to Métraux, the Tapirape were known to have been on the Araguaya as early as the 18th century. He believes the Tapirape to be fugitives from the coast of Brazil, probably from the vicinity of Rio, possibly from the Tamoyo. Certainly they came from the east, but my material points to a migration from the northeast rather than from the southeast, as would be the case if migration had been from the forests of Rio. Métraux, Alfred, Migrations Historiques des Tupi-Guarani, *Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris, N.S.* 19, 24 (1927).

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them. "Is it true," they ask, pointing westward, "that there is another Araguaya (large river) there?" 823

The Tapirape know well their traditional country—that territory north of the Tapirape River to the River Preto, and west to the Araguaya. They know the plains country which borders the Tapirape River and the tropical forest to the north where formerly their five villages stretched in a line some fifty to seventy-five miles apart. At least once during a man's life it was customary to visit all these villages, and before setting out he would acquaint himself with the rivers, hills, and good hunting places along the trail. At the present time, since the Tapirape are a sedentary agricultural people, depending upon large gardens of manioc, corn, yams, and bananas, rather than upon hunting as the chief basis of their food supply, and since they have no trade, they do little travelling. The spatial limit of their direct experience is small. [361] [574] [241] [494]

Knowledge of the horizons beyond their direct experience—of far off places and people, of the supernatural and spirit worlds, of the heavens, of the origins of peoples and things, comes to them only through stories of their legendary heroes, or through experiences of their shamans. Myths relate the creation, adventures, and travels of a series of ancestor culture heroes who took the form of civilizing gods.[3] Tapirape shamans travel widely in their dreams; they whisk off to far places—to the Araguaya, to the heavens, to the home of Thunder (see p. 257)—in their "canoes" (squeezed gourds used as eating utensils by the Tapirape), or they may take the form of a bird as they travel in dreams. Since a Tapirape has this great wealth of vicarious experience to draw upon, he never answers for himself when asked of those realms beyond his knowledge. Instead he tells of the exploits of a legendary culture hero, or of the travels of a shaman "who has been there." 773 [756] [787] [415] [823]

The Tapirape are thus equipped with a wide range of second-hand experience. They have no concept of a closed or limited universe. New knowledge either adds to, or fits into, their second-hand knowledge of a broad universe. Thus a Tapirape youth, seeing for the first time the large rock formation at the mouth of the Tapirape River, identified it as the place in which Panchai, a contemporary shaman, had seen the tremendous red parrots from which the supernatural pluck feathers. Similarly, one travelling on the Araguaya recognized the large rapids below Santa Maria do Araguaya as those created by Kauwalua, a culture hero, to com- 772 823

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[3] Métraux, Alfred. La Religion des Tupinamba (1928), p. 7: "Pour les Tupinamba, comme pour la plupart des tribus sudaméricaines, certains personnages doués d'une puissance supérieure à celle du commun des mortels ont été les artisans du monde tel qu'il se présentait à leurs yeux, mais ils en ont été souvent moins les créateurs que les transformateurs. Je veux dire par là que, même s'ils ont créé le ciel, les astres, et la mer, leur œuvre est toujours partielle et incomplète, ne s'achevant que postérieurement à la suite d'incidents divers."

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823 772 memorate the spot where he had eaten plentifully of fish. The Tapirape view of the world is an expanding one; the people are eager to acquire more knowledge, as is attested by their numerous questions about one's home and one's people, about the sea, the mountains, and distant places.

773 In point of time, the Tapirape consider the present as the third world. Twice people were destroyed, once by flood and once by universal fire. Before these catastrophes, there were pre-Tapirape called Karanjuntuwera. These people lacked the many refinements which were later brought to the Tapirape by their culture heroes. They ate several varieties of wild seeds, they did not have maize, manioc or any modern garden plants, and they lacked the bow and arrow. The Tapirape are not certain whether the Karanjuntuwera lived before or after the flood, but when the great deluge came, one man and one woman climbed a small palm tree which grew as rapidly as the water rose, carrying them above the flood. After they had been there some time the man began to spear fish and snakes[3] which swarmed in the waters, using the long narrow palm leaves as spears. As he killed a fish or snake, the waters gradually diminished and finally ran back into the river-beds.

Four ancestors escaped the second destruction[4] of people—the universal fire. These ancestors took the form of birds: there were two *jacu* which were men, and one periquito and one *mutum*, both women.[5] These escaped underground and from the union of the two couples came "men" or *anipa anu*, as modern Tapirape call themselves.[6]

[101]

773 "Culture heroes" were primarily instrumental in making the Tapirape world what it is. When and in what order these heroes came is not stated.

776 Among them was Petura, a supernatural ancestor and great trickster. He stole fire from the vultures, day or dawn from the night owls, and *genipa*[7] from monkeys. These he brought as gifts to the Tapirape. Finally Petura

776 went far to the northeast "where the earth ends and water begins" to live

[775] in Maratawa,[8] the home of all Tapirape culture heroes, of shamans after

[756] death, and of the sun and the moon. There he lives today. He never dies,

[3] From these primordial flood snakes, say the Tapirape, descended their neighbors and enemies, the Carajá. "They (the snakes) had circles under their eyes" (the tribal face tattooing of Carajá).

[4] The sequence of fire and flood does not seem to be clear in legends. Two informants placed the fire before the flood. Periods during both epochs are spoken of as Karanjuntuwera.

[136] [5] *Jacu*: edible forest fowl, about the size of a large chicken, genus *Penelope*, several species. Periquito: *Pyrrhura rislani*. *Mutum*: *Crax fasciolata*.

[6] See Baldus, Herbert, Ensaios de Etnologia Brasileira, pp. 207-210.

[7] *Genipa rubiacea* or *Genipa americana*: fruit from which black body dye is made.

[823] [8] Several informants described Maratawa as an island. To the Tapirape, the lighted sky is encircled by black sky and on all sides below the edges of the lighted sky "where the black sky begins", the earth ends and water begins. Thus earth is a large island surrounded by water on all sides. The Tapirape are quite willing to grant, however, that beyond this water may be another earth.

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but lives and re-lives his life cycle as the cycle of the seasons. In the early rains of October to January, Petura is a small boy. During the heavy rains of January to March, he is an adolescent youth. He is a young warrior as the rains diminish in April to June, and as the year draws to its close for the Tapirape during the remaining dry months, Petura becomes old. Then as the year begins again with the first refreshing rains of October, he begins a new life cycle. This is the agricultural year for the Tapirape. They plant when he is young (October) and harvest as he matures (in May and June).

Petura was not the only hero who benefited the Tapirape. To the "home of the gods" travelled Tomatociri and Mukwura II, other ancestor heroes, in search of their father Mukwura. There Mukwura gave his son, Tomatociri, the bow and arrow which he brought back to the Tapirape. There, too—and this is typical of Tapirape readjustment to newly-learned knowledge—the younger brother Mukwura II was given fire arms which he transmitted to his descendants, the Europeans or Turí.[9]

Shamans are equated with these ancestor heroes. If shamans die a non-violent death, they go immediately to Maratawa where they live plentifully supplied with food, tobacco, and all aids to the good life. If they die violently, however (i.e., are suspected of sorcery and killed by the Tapirape) they go to another home of shamans in the west. This is the "house of the winds" where the heavy winds blowing from the southwest come during the late dry season. They are given an artificial face, and they stay here until they heal before going east to join their companions in Maratawa. Only shamans and culture heroes continue after life in the form that they had on earth.

It is chiefly through shamans that the Tapirape know of the sun, moon and other heavenly bodies. A shaman had seen the sun "close by." The sun, he said, is an old man with no hair on his head. He travels through the heavens wearing a large head-dress of red parrot feathers, and since red parrot feathers are "hot," the head-dress gives off heat. Each night, after limping through his daily orbit (for the "sky is rough" and the sun continually has thorns in his feet) he returns underground to the east to his house at Maratawa.[10] There he eats very little and in a short time sets out again. The morning after Wamanamu, a shaman, had died, several Tapirape saw that the sun was red; it was very "hot" and angry because a shaman had died.

As the sun is male, so the moon is female. Both are thought of as people,

[9] I was unable to get the original of this story before the obvious change was made to make it fit with new conditions. It is similar, however, to a Tupinamba story recorded by Thevet and quoted by Métraux (*ibid.*, p. 11), which tells of Arasoeia and Tamendonare, twin sons of Sumay.

[10] See Métraux, *ibid.*, p. 14, for Sipaia version.

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and in myth the sun is called Ancerika and the moon Tamparawa, both names of people. According to the Tapirape, the moon is sister to the sun and is married to Anchopeteri, a culture hero who was instrumental in dividing all birds into two groups,[11] and who taught Tapirape how to wrestle and sing many songs. Because of sexual misbehavior, Sun is said to have slapped Moon full in the face with his hand which was wet with black *genipa* dye, thus the marks on the face of the moon are explained.

Two large planets were formerly Tapirape culture bearers. Apuwenonu[12] (Venus) came down from the sky one night after having watched Anuntero, a Tapirape woman, for a long time, and lived with the Tapirape. At night he was a young man, husband of Anuntero, but by day he appeared to people as a decrepit old man. He taught Anuntero how to plant cotton and how to spin. He taught the Tapirape[13] how to plant their modern garden products, maize, manioc, *cara*, yams. Finally Apuwenonu returned to the sky, taking with him his earthly son by Anuntero who is called Imauawango (Jupiter). Today, the Tapirape point to these two planets, recounting their story and saying, "Apuwenonu is young at night when he is in the sky, but by day he is old again as he was when he left us."

Many other constellations are known, but of importance in story are possibly only that called by the Tapirape "the jaguar,"[14] and the Pleiades.[15] One shaman told me that he had travelled (in dreams) to visit this jaguar. He was "friendly" with it, he said, and if he should be killed, the jaguar of the sky would send many real jaguars to prey upon the Tapirape. "Men would be afraid to step into the forest at night." The jaguar had become one of his retinue of familiar powers which would aid him in struggles with other shamans.

The Pleiades are important calendrically. They are watched anxiously and impatiently as the rains diminish, and their disappearance over the western horizon in May signals the end of the rains. This is the time for

[11] At the present time men's moieties are divided into three age grades. Each age grade of each moiety carries the name of a bird: one being species of small *papagaio*, and the other species of white water birds. According to myth, these groups derived from similar divisions of the bird world in which Anchopeteri lived.

[12] This is probably identical with Monan (or Maire-monan, according to Métraux), civilising god of Tupinambá, who created earth, people, birds and animals, and finally taught the Tupinambá to distinguish useful plants. He was put to death by men, at which time he was transformed into a star "with two of his companions." Métraux, *ibid.*, p. 11.

[13] One text calls them Karajumowera (pre-Tapirape) at this time (see p. 354).

[14] Ancient Guarani said that there was a very large tiger or dog which on certain occasions ate the sun and moon, causing an eclipse. Apapocuva-Guarani speak of a celestial jaguar; and the Chane from Chiriguano explain the eclipse in the same manner. Métraux, *ibid.*, p. 50.

[15] "Les Pléiades paraissaient avoir été chez les Tupinamba l'objet de croyances particulières. Ils avaient notamment la conviction qu'elles favorisaient la croissance du manioc." Métraux, Religion des Tupinambá, p. 51.

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the largest ceremonial of the year which marks the beginning of the dry season and the harvest. Similarly, the position of the Pleiades is noted to date the many ceremonies of the heavy rainy period (November to April). One shaman had visited the Pleiades, and they, too, can be counted upon as a familiar power. The Milky Way is often referred to as the "path of the shaman," it is a well-beaten road over which the shaman travels through the sky in his dreams.

In common with many Tupi peoples, nothing in the realm of natural phenomena is as important to the Tapirapé as thunder. Among most Tupi, Tupan is a god or an ancestor identified with thunder. He causes the rumbling of thunder and flashes of lightning. Among the Tapirapé, however, Thunder[16] is a separate entity, a supernatural who has many "creatures" or *topã*. *Topã* are described as small beings about a hand's length in size, with white hairy down over their bodies, and wearing a small head-dress of red parrot feathers, European beads, and a lip plug. Small wax dolls are made in imitation of them. They travel through the sky in small "canoes," especially when there are strong wind and electric storms, and they carry red wild flowers with which they shoot Tapirapé in the stomach. These arrows are hot "like fire." Sometimes *topã* are called "pets" of Thunder, and again they are referred to as his "children." In addition to *topã*, Thunder has other supernaturaleries, the souls of dead shamans, who live in the house of Thunder, commonly thought to be near Maraiwa on the summit of a large mountain.

Each year when approaching rains bring heavy thunder storms, lightning and strong winds, Thunder sends forth his beings. The noise of the storm is caused by rumbling of *topã's* canoes, and flashes of lightning are their speeding arrows. To protect the Tapirapé, and also their gardens, from the storm, shamans[17] "call Thunder," or "fight with *topã*." In a four-day ceremony characterized by genuine fear, shamans gulp tobacco smoke until they are ill and intoxicated, they sing "calling Thunder to come," and chant until they "see" one or more *topã*, or souls of dead shamans,[18] fight with them, and are struck down by their arrows. A shaman who fights a *topã* tries to grab its small feather head-dress, take away its bow, or yank out its lip plug, its most vulnerable feature.

Violent behavior is the keynote of these ceremonies of fighting Thunder. When a shaman is shot by *topã*, he falls screaming upon the ground, writhing and shaking, and then becomes unconscious. If men are not near

[16] Thunder referred to as Kanawana (direct translation) is said to be called Pururuka, his personal name.

[17] Laymen and neophytes who have sufficient courage may also participate.

[18] In conversation and in song, there is confusion between these beings. Although the above distinctions are definitely made, they are often referred to interchangeably. For example, a Tapirapé may say, "*topã* cause lightning," or "Thunder is angry and makes lightning."

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to hold him, he may run wild through the village destroying property and endangering people. To bring him back, smoke must be blown over him by a shaman. While he is unconscious, he dreams and travels, sometimes visiting the house of Thunder.

"I smoked much and then I smoked again. I sang. I saw one large sun and it came toward me and disappeared. I saw many small suns. They came and they left. I saw Thunder. It was small and came (to the house) in a small canoe. It was Thunder's child (a *tupé*). It wore a small headdress of parrot feathers. It had a small lip plug. I reached to pull out the lip plug but it left." [The shaman did not conquer the *tupé* and he was shot down by an arrow while he was unconscious] . . . "all was dark. I saw many suns. I travelled singing as I walked. I spent three days walking. I climbed a large mountain on the other side of the Araguaya. There it is that the sun comes up. I saw Kanawana. He was big and his body was covered with much hair. He had many red parrot feathers. There were many *tupé* and many souls of shamans. I did not talk but came back." [If he had touched Thunder's rattle he would have stayed (died), but he was properly treated with tobacco smoke and returned to consciousness.]

Through shamans and legends of culture heroes, the Tapirapé know, too, of the multitude of "spirits" (*anchenga*) which populate the unseen world. These are of two general types: true spirits, disembodied souls of deceased Tapirapé;[19] and demons or malevolent beings of many classes. Shamans are accustomed to seeing true spirits in their dreams. These generally inhabit abandoned village sites, where they re-live their earthly lives. When they die—the second death—they become frogs, deer, *jaco* and doves. Thus the toad is the spirit of a chief; the dove and *jaco* are spirits of men.[20] These ghosts cannot harm shamans who are accustomed to seeing them, but sometimes the spirits attack and strike down defenseless laymen.[21] They also cluster around a man's bier to carry off the soul as soon as the body is buried.

There are infinite numbers of "spirits" of the individualized demoniac class. Of these, some are "pets" which are not very dangerous, and which are represented by men in the mask dance cult.[22] Other species are very dangerous, but these are no longer seen by the layman. Formerly, these were numerous, and killed many Tapirapé, but Ware, a culture hero and powerful shaman, fought them and killed many. A man now points to the

[19] Speaking of Tupinambá, Métraux makes these same two categories of "supernatural beings" (*ayguare, aguia, ingange* and *anchenga*), *ibid.*, p. 51.

[20] Animals which have, or are, spirits can be grouped together. These may taboo to some age and sex groups, in a complicated dietary system.

[21] Dogs can see spirits. When a dog howls, Tapirapé say, "He sees *anchenga* but we can't."

[22] At one time women may have been frightened by these "dangerous" spirits, but certainly at present everything in the man's cults is known to women, and they do not even pretend to be frightened.

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A man now points to the

southwestern horizon and says, "Ware killed all spirits there; they are only spirit souls now." (To the north and east, however, many demon spirits are still alive and active.) Ware engaged in a constant battle of wits with the spirit world. He killed many of the dangerous variety by setting fire to their stringy hair which trailed behind them, and he also killed off another group of beings which clubbed men to death and drank their blood.

Sometimes shamans (*pawche*) see malevolent beings in their dream travels, and may even become friendly with them or receive their aid. For example, one shaman told of wandering far in an unknown forest as he dreamed, and of coming upon the spirits called *awrya*, who have long hair wound in a mass, and who carry only one arrow with which they can kill a man. They were about to shoot him but he shouted "No, I am a shaman!" and they left him alone, gave him food and aided him to return. Only shamans can have such relations with these supernaturals. Tapirapé laymen are afraid to dream.

The shaman is indispensable to Tapirapé living, not only because he has dealings with the spirit world, and through his wanderings enriches the knowledge of men, but also because he is of value in many practical ways. Thus he controls the pregnancy of women. Pregnancy is known to relate to sexual intercourse, but conception comes only when a shaman brings a child to a woman. Thunder, and several types of birds, animals and fish, have "children," that is, spirits of children. The shaman brings one of these "spirits" to a woman, putting it inside her while she sleeps. A woman who wants a child can, for example, bring honey to a shaman. This will make him dream, and he will bring her a child. Similarly, a barren woman presumably "had quarrelled much with the shaman."

When Tapirapé swim, while fishing and shooting large turtles in the Tapirapé River, their safety depends upon the shaman. In this section of Brazil, rivers are full of alligators, *piranha* (carnivorous fish) and sting rays, and according to Tapirapé belief, large snakes lurk in deep pools. Before men may swim safely the shaman must tie the jaws of the alligators, strike the *piranha* across their teeth so they will not bite, and tie up the tails of the large snakes. When Tapirapé go hunting, it is up to the shaman to tell them where packs of wild pigs will be found, or to lead them down to a good spot in the plains country.[20] Danger may lurk in all food; thus Tapirapé often take new corn, fresh meat, or any food, to have danger "blown" out of it by the shaman.

The universe for the Tapirapé is not finite or entirely known; it is dangerous. Tales of culture heroes and experiences of shamans provide a

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[20] When the Tapirapé have made kills of wild pigs, which are "pets" of Thunder he will be angry and send a sudden rain or clouding of the sky. If a Tapirapé sees an unexpected rainbow in the sky he will say, "The shaman has been successful against Thunder" (i.e., in finding game).

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773 large framework into which all new knowledge can be fitted. And this
756 universe is dangerous. The shaman, by the use of his wisdom and insight,
his familiarity with celestial powers, spirits and far off places, is the only
758 intermediary between men and supernaturals. Through him, the Tapirapé
759 attempt to control their hostile and unpredictable world. Without the
shaman, as one informant said, "All Tapirapé would die."

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